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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #103

Q. Now that the ceasefire is off, do you think the political parties and the king should unite?

Total votes: 1,878

Weekly Internet Poll #104. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. How do you rate the chances of an all-party government being formed?

Civilians flee fighting in midwest

NETRA KC in NEPALGANJ

Reports from Rolpa indicate the fighting this week between joint security forces and the Maoists was more fierce than previously reported, with large numbers of civilians fleeing the area. Security officials here told us that about 100 rebels were killed in clashes around the Maoist training areas in Bhawang, 15km northwest from the district headquarters of Libang. Fifty-six Maoist bodies have been recovered so far. They also said reinforcements had been flown into the area and it was under army control. Some police officers who arrived here Thursday morning from near the scene of the fighting said the army had fired at rebel positions from helicopters and reported many civilian casualties in Bhawang. The army says five soldiers were killed, but so far the bodies of only two policemen have been brought down to Nepalganj. Security officials have been unusually tight-lipped about combat details.



As news of the fighting in Rolpa spread, villagers from other midwestern districts have started fleeing their homes. But their movement has been restricted because of the three-day bandh. Thirty-year old Tanka Budathoki of Dang was given two choices: join the Maoists or die. He gave himself a third choice: abandon his home and family. He says he has no other option but to go to India and find a job. Raji Sejuwal's eyes glisten as he recounts how he left his village in Jumla to try to get into the army. He was rejected, and now he can't go back because the Maoists will kill him if they find out that he tried to get recruited. Harka Bahadur Biswakarma from Surkhet returned from India to celebrate Dasai with his family, but is going right back. "There is just too much bloodshed and fear in my village." Pari Adhikari from Jajarkot came down to Nepalganj to catch a bus to India and is walking across the border. He told us: "I am not going to come back until there is permanent peace in my country."

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"Nepal is safe." But the industry is in deep depression.



NARESH NEWAR

As news of the breakdown of the ceasefire spread, Nepal's tourism industry suffered a tide of cancellations for the autumn season. Many even cancelled their tickets from Bangkok airport, choosing to go to India instead. The few groups who braved the media representations of a nation in conflict were pleasantly surprised. They have this to say

to fellow travellers: "Nepal is still safe for tourists. This is not our war."

Stobhan O'Reilly was trekking in the Annapurna Conservation Area in late August when she heard the news. Now back in Kathmandu, she feels there is no real threat to people like her. "I actually had a good time and the only problem was the excessive traffic jam along the highway because of the security checks," O'Reilly says. In fact, the

young Irish lawyer is so impressed with Nepal she is off to Everest Base Camp this week with a group of friends from South Africa.

"I'm more worried about the weather than anything," says Arne Hofkamp, a 23-year-old architect from the Netherlands, who had initially no clue about the situation in Nepal till he got to Bangkok and received a thumbnail sketch from other passengers.

"Not that it bothered me. From what I hear, the worst thing that could happen is paying off the Maoists," says Hofkamp. "Maybe they'll give me a discount!"

A number of tourists we spoke to in Thamel told us their Nepali tour operators seemed more worried about their safety than they were. "Initially when I was home the news made me nervous, but now I'm not worried at all," says Bruijnen Pieter who plans to mountain bike from Lhasa through Kodari to Kathmandu.

Arie Ocidenarnde and Bianca Vanderwal were quite annoyed when the locals constantly reminded them of potential dangers. "Most of them told us not to go out of the Valley. They were being overcautious," says Ocidenarnde. "I'll encourage my people to visit Nepal because there's nothing to worry about," says Vanderwal.

For Israeli tourists Owen Bromberg and his girlfriend, the conflict is the least of their concerns. They still think Nepal is safer than India, or Israel. "We didn't take any local guides with us," they say. "This is nothing like the suicide bombers we face in our streets," adds Bromberg. The two are headed on a month-long trek to Annapurna Base Camp.

Even American tourists don't feel particularly threatened. "You hear a lot of rumours at home and especially Bangkok, but the feeling is different here. Tourists need to come here and find out for themselves," says Meg Anderson (see pic, left), who calls herself a global adventure traveller. Meg and her friends are now already on their way to Everest Base Camp. "If they don't like Americans, we'll say we're Spanish," says her friend Ryan Smith, laughing. He is unfazed by the recent news of Maoist harassment, and threats against Americans. "I wouldn't worry so much about it, and miss out the great adventure that is Nepal."

See also: Doom and gloom in Thamel, p 4-5

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NEPALI RESILIENCE

Nepalis have never been as despondent about their future as they are now. Yet, with Dasai and Tihar around the corner, we must try to restore some of our lost self-esteem. Not the deceptive optimism in an elusive peace, but bringing back a sense of realistic faith in our own resilience and inner strength as a people.

Nepal is the oldest nation-state in the subcontinent. It has a remarkable capacity for bouncing back which manifests itself during traumatic periods of our history. True, our national institutions have been weakened by political interference, neglect and, it must be said, we have rarely had the rulers we deserved.

But this is also a society and a nation that has an innate ability to rebound in an instant. We just need the occasional visionary to tide us over bad times. The very fact that such a saviour has not arrived must indicate that things are not as bad as we think they are.

The foundations of national identity built over the last two centuries are strong. We may not agree on what that identity is exactly, but a sense of Nepalihood courses in our veins. A decade of democracy has now laid roots right down to the villages, giving Nepalis a sense that they command their own destiny.

The astounding thing is that while pampered Kathmandu moans and groans, across Nepal even people who have suffered dislocation, bereavement or loss of livelihood have taken the hardships, threats and violence in their stride while they wait for a better tomorrow.

Nepal's strength comes from the diversity that makes us a whole. We are stronger than the sum of our parts. It is like the story of the old man who asks his sons to break a stick, and then asks them to break a bundle of twigs. There is still a lot of inequity and exclusion, but we have the mechanism to mend that because the people have learnt to be in charge. In the end, it is decentralised local self-governance that is going to make possible economic progress which all Nepalis can share.

When the right ingredients (leadership, an accountable and receptive government, an energised citizenry) come together, Nepal takes rapid strides. We can see this in forestry, small hydropower, the spread of community radio, the rapid acceptance of biogas for home fuel—all fields in which Nepal is a model for other developing countries. The emergence of Nepal as a centre for medical education, management colleges and universities is a harbinger of our transition into a service economy that can take advantage of our location and climate. The professionalism of our tourist industry is of exportable quality.

The national economy will be transformed when trade with India and access to the sea gets a boost. Tibet is opening up with railways and roads, which will allow the Nepali economy to also expand northwards. And through all this, we have Nepalis abroad who are keeping this nation's economy afloat in hard times.

We can share these opportunities among all Nepalis in a way that gives the underprivileged a chance to catch up. The only way we can do that is through representative democracy. The pre-requisite for that is political peace. And for peace we have to first close the distance between constitutional forces.



MIN BAURACHARYA

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Time to get the story straight

The present reality is bleak, but the Nepalis' belief that things will get better seems to endure.

They are widening the road to Budhanilkantha, and contractors are trying to frantically finish the work before Dasai. A roadroller takes up half the road, the other half is taken up by vehicles waiting to be checked by a lone security man.

Kathmandu's SUV-set driving to suburban mansions and commuters crammed inside vintage vans jostle to get ahead at the bottleneck. It takes 30 minutes

to cover a distance of 12km. At the end of it, Budhanilkantha School stands in its austere majesty. Built by the British to groom Nepal's best and brightest, the school has now become the cradle of the Nepali diaspora: every year, more BKS graduates go abroad than stay in Nepal.

In the shadows of Shivapuri, private promoters have built Siddhartha Colony, a haven for the city's upwardly mobile. It has

some of the most expensive dwelling units in Kathmandu, and is a cacophony of architectural styles that cry for attention: a Rana-Roman palace here, a mock-baroque villa there and a faux-White House tucked in between. This is where Kathmandu's movers and shakers increasingly move and shake.

Here live the people who read *Time* magazine and watch *Star News* to find out what is happening in their own country. However, nothing in Budhanilkantha gives the impression that "it could all go up in flames". People are building new houses as if there were no tomorrow, and building a house is the biggest endorsement of faith in the future. The present reality in the Valley may be bleak, but the Nepalis' belief that things will get better still seems to endure. Imagine if there were a long-term truce.

The management and the staff of the elegant Park Village Hotel here aren't as worried as Gautam Rana, who is featured in last week's issue of *Time*, worrying about his personal safety. Times are bad, there are very few tourists around, but the Park's lobby is bustling with Nepalis attending this seminar or that workshop.

When asked how is business, a staffer is frank: "Not all that good, but we are hoping it will get better soon." If she harbours any fears of her world falling apart, she isn't showing it. She is paying closer attention to getting the ashtrays emptied before the next lot of seminar participants arrive.

It would be foolish to pretend that it's business as usual in Nepal, but how did Alex Perry of *Time* get the impression that Kathmandu is "in danger of rejoining the rest of the country in the Dark Ages"? Perry's story isn't his personal failure. It is generic to all ambulance-chasing journalists who hunt in packs and have to either trash a place or praise it to high heavens—nothing in between. There are no greys in the black-and-white world of parachuting media mercenaries. You jet into town, not seeking a story but confirmation of a preconceived script, meet the people who are waiting to meet you, mangle the copy of the local stringer, liberally sprinkle hyperbole, and then file a feature that refracts reality.

All of this wouldn't have mattered if this particular multinational newsmag

weren't distributed free in every hotel and airline in the region. We hear some sightseeing tourists even cancelled their Nepal trip after they got to Bangkok airport! But how do you explain the Australia-based Asia-Pacific Human Rights Forum cancelling its annual meeting which was to be held 22-24 September in Kathmandu? They probably read *Time*. Spooked by Perry and warned off by knee-jerk embassy travel advisories, we can understand tourists cancelling, but human rights activists fearing for their safety? Don't they listen to their contacts in the United Nations in Kathmandu? In this sad and costly seven-year war, it is ordinary Nepalis who have suffered and died. They are the ones who face threats, extortion and fears of safety every day. Not foreigners. Not tourists. And especially not international human rights activists meeting in an international hotel. When will the 'Nepal Desks' at overseas ministries so quick to put out travel advisories to protect their behinds understand this? When will South Asia correspondents in Delhi stop behaving like birds on a wire? There is a moral in this for our own paranoid elite: next time be careful what you tell parachutists. They care not for the truth and will twist your words to suit their script. ♦



LETTERS

BABURAM

Your translation of Baburam Bhattarai's opinion (From the Nepali Press, #162) gave a clearcut view of what the Maoists are after. It showed they are against the whole concept of the 'Kingdom of Nepal', the monarchy and democratic multiparty parliamentary system. Bhattarai says it was the monarchy that led to the downfall of the Nepali people and that the monarchy should take responsibility for this doom. I have a few questions:

- Where would we be if it was not for King Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification campaign?
- Would there be anything called a 'Nepal'?

Baburam also has to answer the question: will this country turn into Singapore overnight if the king quits the throne? Why is a republic tag so important? Why are these people who are fighting a war in the peoples' name so afraid to face the people in an election or referendum? We need answers. It is clear from Baburam's piece that all the Maoists are after is to throw out the king and rule the country themselves. If another round of talks are held, the people will speak out, and by people I don't mean the buddhujibis and nagarik samaj speaking on their behalf, but the people directly. The people also need to tell the political parties that if they had not wasted the years after 1990, we would not be in this mess. The Maoists are on a path of self-destruction and if they continue on this track they will take the country down with them.

YK Sharma, Baneswor

GOVERNMENT

I appreciate the idea of including Maoists in development (Involve Maoists in development? #162) although I doubt its practical feasibility in terms of implementation. Theoretically, the logic is noble. It tries to address the politics of exclusion at the grassroots level, lets stakeholders feel part of the development process and makes the benefit of development accessible to everyone, irrespective of their political belief. The main question, however, is how this going to happen? Unless the Maoists are brought into the political mainstream at the national level, it is almost impossible to imagine



that they would agree to work together with the government or other people who belong to political parties at the local level. So if we really worry about delivering the fruits of development to everyone, we should concentrate on first solving the Maoist crisis.

Poshendra Satyal,
Cambridge, UK

- I am aghast at the naivety shown by foreign donors in Nepal. How on earth is the government going to involve the Maoists in development, when the Maoists have said that they don't want to be involved? In the Maoist 'base areas' we have seen that development is the least of their priorities. Their priorities are extortion, forced recruitment of child soldiers and killing or driving out anyone who does not believe in their ideology. Nepal's donors need to dump their romantic notions of a revolution and try to help the government address the security problem so that peace can be restored and development restarted.

SB Thapa, Kathmandu

- Navin Singh Khadka describes the resistance of the government and the Maoists to several of Nepal's donor agencies' proposals to restart development projects in Maoist stronghold areas. The resistance

of the government exemplifies its military-based formula for national-security: a top-down approach. What the donor agencies are proposing is a bottom-up approach to establishing security and peace in Nepal that looks beyond traditional security definitions.

In Nepal and many other nation-states, military-centered conceptions of national-security predominate. Typically when the stability of a state falters, even from internal threats, the state-military's role is to 'secure' the nation through an exercise of power. Currently in Nepal, curfews, checkpoints and 'armed encounters' are some of the manifestations of security measures. However, for the people of Nepal, disease, hunger and poverty prevail as causes of destabilisation and insecurity. In addition, children raised in a culture of violence and the dissolution of family structures because of migration, displacement and the loss of family members are emerging threats to human security.

Seeking security from a traditional military-centered approach begs the question, security for whom? The proposition of various donor agencies to resume development projects in the Maoist controlled regions with the involvement of Maoists is progressive to say the least, and precisely what is

needed. The insecurity of the people of Nepal can not be understood by the same military-centric approach that is floating over society at present.

Individuals fit into the broader structures of war and violence differently to governments and the ruling elite. What is military action against internal unrest except a method of stabilising state structures and protecting the positions of the ruling elite? It does little for the faltering human condition.

At the same time, perhaps the Maoists should consider expanding their mode of revolution, as they too have appeared non-supportive of the donor agencies' proposal. The suggestion here is not that the traditional military-based mode of security is unnecessary but that it is not sufficient to deal with conflicts that stem from identity politics and economic deprivation. Since the violence has grown from the ground-up,

wouldn't it make more sense to address it in the same manner?

Carolyn Rodal, Kirtipur

ARNIKO

Arniko Society is an association of graduates from China, and we believe in deeds more than words. Which may be why our contributions to Nepal-China relations have not reached the ears of Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman ('Yams in boulderland', #161). We are the sole organisation involved in erecting the statue of Arniko at the White Pagoda premises in Beijing. It is the first figure of a Nepali personality installed at a public place in China, and 85 percent of the cost was borne by the Arniko Society and the remaining by Himalayan Bank. Nepal Tourism Board and Royal Nepal Airlines helped in the week long Nepal Festival following the unveiling of the statue. Please visit our site, arnikosociety.com for details. Our next project is to install a statue of

Manjushree in China's Wutai mountains. We welcome contributions.

LK Thapa, Arniko Society

MISS NEPAL

I did not watch the Miss Vatika Beauty Pageant live on NTV, but what I witnesses the next day were three very worthy Nepali women defending their titles once again to the mother of all judges: the host (what's his face?) of the talk show *Bahas*. Yes, Nepal is in deep crisis, there is violence and conflict. Nepal is burning, so what are we supposed to do, jump into the flames? Shouldn't those who can at least try to get the country moving with new plans and creative ideas? As the new Miss Nepal rightly told the talk show host: "Look up to us." Bravo. Who knows, the country may actually celebrate a day of ceasefire if she is crowned Miss World.

Alok Maskey, Dhobighat

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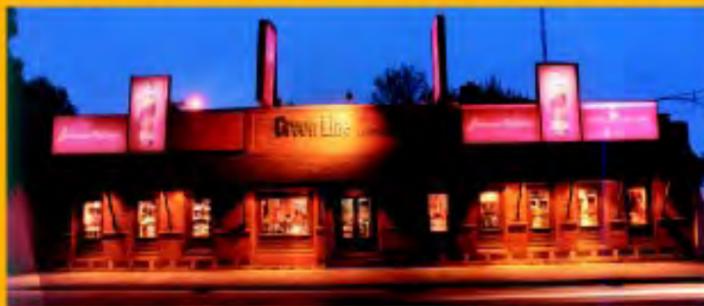
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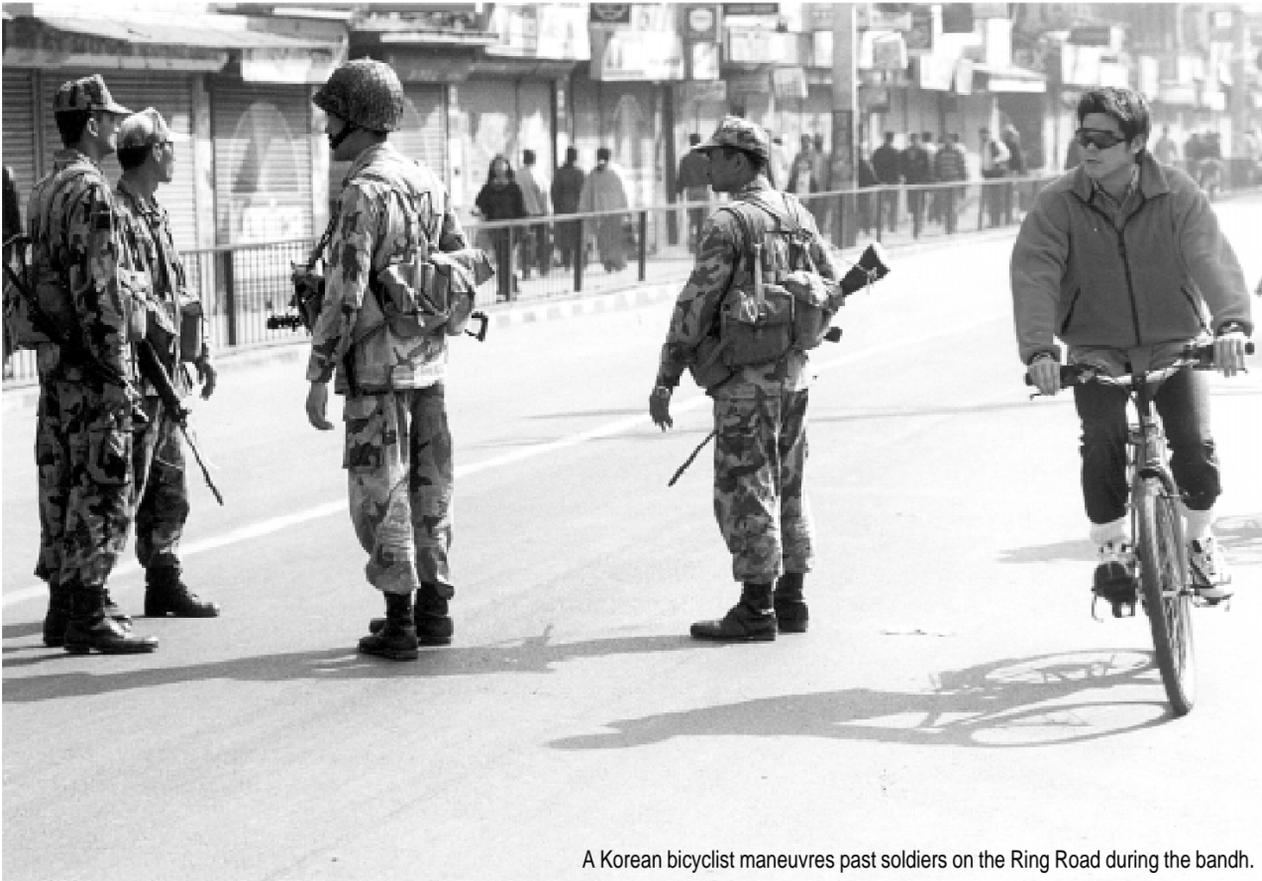


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A Korean bicyclist manoeuvres past soldiers on the Ring Road during the bandh.

Gloom and doom in Thamel

The end of the ceasefire has wiped out Nepal's autumn tourist season.

NARESH NEWAR

Just when it was beginning to rebound after the ceasefire and the publicity surrounding the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest, Nepal's tourism is in a tail spin again.

Now with news of violence, curfews and bandhs, tour groups are cancelling their Nepal holidays and the figures for arrivals in 2003 are likely to fall to 150,000—the lowest since 1998. Even though no tourists have been harmed in the past seven years of conflict and most trekking areas are as safe as they have always been, international media coverage of the insurgency has made tourists nervous.

"It's not that the tourists are afraid to visit Nepal," one Kathmandu tour operator told us. "But they want us to guarantee their safety—something that we

are unable to do." The travel industry says only one thing will save it now: a joint declaration by Maoists and the army that trekkers will not be harmed. Cancellations for the autumn season are coming in thick and fast, spreading the doom and gloom in tourist areas like Thamel.

After 15 years in the business, Sanat Shrestha is planning to shut his tours and trekking office in Thamel. Twenty people who worked to make Explore Alpine Adventure the successful venture it once was, will be out of their jobs. "I don't know what am I supposed to do now. Tourism is the only thing I know," says one of his staff. Even Shrestha is unsure about his future. "I don't know where to invest anymore, I don't know where to go," he says.

At the beginning of August,

Shrestha's autumn bookings were looking good. He had 80 German and Slovenian groups coming in. Last week all 80 groups cancelled. Shrestha was shattered and that was when he decided that he had to close. "I had no other option," he told us. He needs a minimum of Rs 100,000 every month for rent, staff salaries and other recurring expenses.

After the January ceasefire, Nepali tour operators were surprised by the volume of bookings from the US, which had suffered heavily since September 2001. But when Maoists started their strong anti-American rhetoric as they broke the ceasefire, it spooked the Americans again. A trekking guide who recently returned from western Nepal told us Maoists warned him against bringing tourists from the US, UK and

Belgium.

Although they know that the end of the ceasefire was to blame, many tour operators lash out at some Kathmandu-based embassies for their over-cautious advisories. Ang T Sherpa, president of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), agrees: "I was in Germany when the ceasefire was still on, but I was surprised to hear from the consul generals that they did not get the correct information from Nepal." When in London recently, Sherpa was surprised by the positive interest that a lot of people displayed, thanks in part to the Everest Golden Jubilee earlier this year. Queries and bookings for adventure tourism poured in.

In fact, mountaineering is the only silver lining for this autumn season. More than 100

expeditions are still coming to Nepal, buoyed by the Everest publicity. Larger trekking agencies and those handling mountaineering expeditions don't report as many cancellations. "I don't think the situation matters to these adventure tourists who are totally different from luxurious cultural sightseeing tourists," says Sherpa. "Nepal is still safer than New York."

Although Sherpa does not want to make a blanket statement on the safety of Nepal, he points out that since the 'people's war' began, about 3.5 million tourists visited Nepal and not a single one was harmed by the rebels. Nepal has remained a safe destination for the tourists, unlike the Philippines and Indonesia.

"We're confused: if we tell them that Nepal is not safe then our tourism business will collapse

but if we tell them not to worry, visit us, then who will be responsible in case they happen to get hurt?" asks Sherpa.

Nepal Tourism Board and private trekking offices invested a lot of money on promotional tours and exhibitions abroad during the ceasefire. Hotels spent millions on redecorating and renovations to welcome what they hoped would be the first of a tide of tourists during Dasai and Tihar. Now, it's a grim situation, especially for those who took out loans for the business that is not going to come.

"I don't know how we're going to cope with this. If the problem persists, what is the next step for us?" Rajan Sakya of the legendary Kathmandu Guest House asks no one in particular. This is the oldest budget hotel in Thamel, one that set the trend for a new kind of tourism in Nepal in

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

War over words



It has not been easy to explain Nepal's return to war to people outside the kingdom. My editors, for example, at various publications and broadcast outlets around the world, want to know why the ceasefire between Maoists and government broke down. This is a crucial question at the heart of the type of journalism I like to practice. Why did it happen?

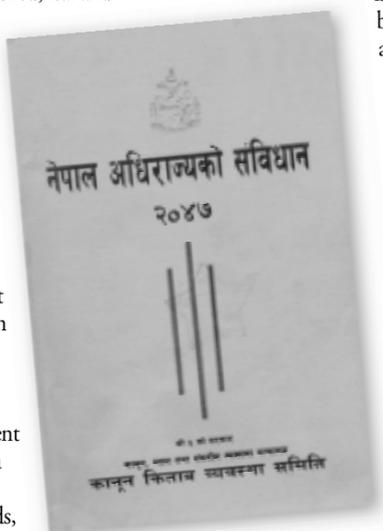
"Well," I tell them, "the Maoists wanted a constituent assembly and the government didn't." End of story. Back to bloodshed, fear and a clouded future for Nepal. "Hang on," they say, in various ways, "doesn't Nepal already have a constitution?" Yes, I explain, it does. Long silence down the telephone line, followed by, "But, surely a country with a constitution doesn't need a civil war to produce another one, or amend what they've got. Surely all you do is lock a bunch of lawyers and experts and politicians in a room until they draw something up? You don't need a war."

That, my friends, is the view from points west and east, from those who take my journalism. I can't for the life of me understand why Nepal is once again at war because of a constituent assembly. So important was this putative gathering to two groups of negotiators—one hardened rebel ideologues and warriors, the other pragmatic veterans of Nepali recent political history—that neither could come up with a form of words to keep the country at peace.

For that is what a constitution is, a form of words, a document, a contract between rulers and ruled,

supervised by lawyers, courts and activists, of paramount importance to democracy. But a form of words nonetheless. And as such, subject to change by consensus, negotiation or popular demand. Perhaps even by constituent assemblies. By implication, this is the notion at the heart of constitutional democracy. It seems to me then, that what you had at the last negotiating session of government and Maoists was an agreement on the fact that Nepal is a constitutional entity, a country where the deal between the people and the rulers is a matter of mutual agreement.

No country in the world holds its constitution in higher esteem than the United States of America. The document agreed among an 18th century collection of lawyers, activists and experts is still a shining example of the genre, emulated by—among others—those who drew up the constitution of India in 1953 and Nepal in 1990. Yet the Americans don't see the words of their founders as sacred, inviolate, never to be tampered with or changed. No indeed, The Constitution of the United States of America has been amended as per the process agreed by its authors, a grand total of 27 times. This was achieved—as per the constitutional requirement—with the support of two-thirds of Congress and ratification by three-quarters of state legislatures. Checks and balances, the notion that makes America's constitution work. Mind you, not all of the 27 agreed changes made perfect sense, or any



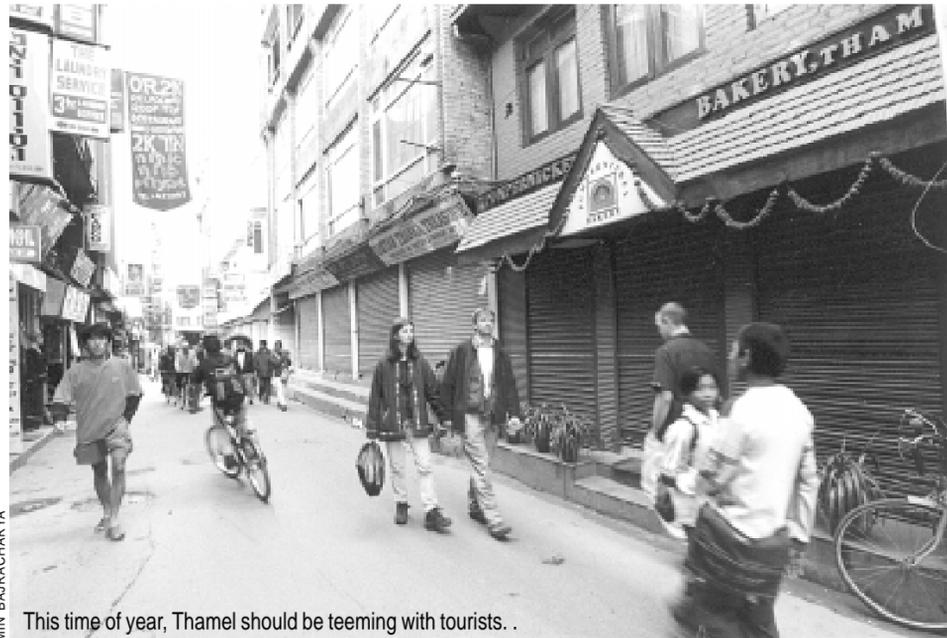
Is it worth destroying a country just because you can't agree on the wording of the constitution?

sense at all for that matter.

Infamously, in 1919, the United States Congress—if you like, the permanent Constituent Assembly of the country—passed the nineteenth amendment, the banning of alcoholic drink from American life. It took, as required, a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress, significantly less than the percentage of congressmen that drank alcohol regularly. But the amendment passed nonetheless, only to be repealed, by a much thirstier congressional majority some years later.

The point is not to speak out for the American system, or a constituent assembly or even the present constitution of Nepal. It's to say that surely avoiding war is the prime concern of peace negotiators. From both sides. The Maoists, it seems, returned to war for want of a form of words. The government side was unable to come up with one. Both sides bear responsibility for the fear and violence at large in the country today.

And it's all because they couldn't find a way to agree on words. It's no consolation to those Nepalis suffering at the moment that history will not look kindly upon such developments—or upon the men behind them. Let's just hope both sides rediscover the power of words, and quickly. ♦



MIN BAJRACHARYA

This time of year, Thamel should be teeming with tourists.

the 1970s. It was recently ranked as one of Asia's top hotels out of 300 surveyed by Asia's Best Hotels & Resorts but that recognition is useless if there are no tourists.

Sakya is in a dilemma because if business does not pick up he may have to lay off most of his 150 staff, people who are like family after working for more than a decade. "I don't even want to think about it," he says. He is concerned for his junior staff, many of whom are not qualified enough to find new jobs.

Sakya has just taken over from his father, Karna Sakya, who founded the hotel. He is confident Nepal's hotel business can develop and attain international standards, but things are discouraging. "It's now

become a question of day-to-day survival," he says.

If a popular hotel like Kathmandu Guest House faces such a crunch, one can only imagine the crisis in other tourist-based businesses. Occupancy is less than half in most lodges and inns, even with drastically reduced rates that barely cover overheads. Some five-star hotels in Kathmandu are giving away rooms for \$20-40 that are listed as \$100-150.

"We charge according to what the clients offer us," says Sundar Shrestha, the owner of the low-budget Hotel Sweet Dreams. He survives on walk-in Spanish and Japanese tourists who pay less than Rs 200 for a room with an

attached bathroom. "There's no work at all, we just sit idle and wait for someone to turn up," says waiter Ramesh Shrestha in Sweet Dream's little restaurant.

The only recourse left for travel and tour operators is to wait for the Maoists to declare peace on tourists like they did last year. The associations of various tourism-based sectors met with human rights activists like Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Daman Nath Dhungana last week to request that the Maoist leaders announce tourists will not be harmed. Joy Dewan, ex-president of Nepal Association of Travel Agents sums it up: "All we can do is wait for their response. This is a war between the state and the Maoists. Tourists have nothing to do with it." ♦

Pessimism in Pokhara



Most Pokhara hotels are still.

This should be the season in which Pokhara is filling up with trekkers bound for the Annapurnas. The restaurants by the lakeside should be full, the airport should be humming with activity. Not this year. More than most other big towns in Nepal, Pokhara's fortunes are tied with tourism. With the ceasefire, hopes were high that tourists would return and they had started trickling back. Indian tourists had come to Pokhara since May and kept the rooms occupied.

Although there have been no major attacks in Pokhara since the ceasefire broke down three weeks ago, the traffic has already fallen off. Reports that trekkers have been forced to pay

Rs 1,000 'revolutionary tax' to Maoists at Birethanti hasn't helped matters, and the word is spreading of Maoist harassment along the trails.

Some of Pokhara's tourism entrepreneurs have left for America or Europe. "If it goes on like this, I'll leave too," says the ex-chairman of the Hotel Association here, Sundar Kumar Shrestha. Many hotels are not even able to pay their electricity bills. Pokhara's largest hotel, Fulbari, owes the NEA Rs 10.8 million and recently had its electricity cut off. The hotel now uses its generator. In the past 15 years, fed by a tourism boom, 300 new hotels were built here to cater to the annual 100,000 visitors. This year, the number is expected to be less than half. Says Biplab Poudel of the Hotel Association: "There used to be a time when all rooms in all hotels were booked. As soon as we took out bank loans and added rooms, the tourists stopped coming." (Ramesh Poudel in Pokhara)

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Full disclosure

The National Human Rights Commission is under international pressure to make public the reports it commissioned on the alleged human rights violations by security forces in Doramba at Ramechhap district, and by Maoist rebels in Panchthar and Siraha. The heads of mission of the EU in Kathmandu called on NHRC Chairman Nayan Bahadur Khatri Tuesday requesting the report be made public. The Royal Nepali Army has reopened its investigation into the 25 August Doramba incident in which 19 people, most of them Maoists, were killed. "The team has already started its work," a senior army official told us. An earlier army report had said the rebels in Doramba were killed in two separate encounters but the Maoists say they were executed after capture.

'Ring for Peace' 21 September

A coalition of groups working to declare Nepali children a zone of peace is organising a Nepal-wide campaign to ring bells for two minutes at noon on Sunday, 21 September, which is International Peace Day. Called 'Ring for Peace' the organisers have asked all Nepalis to take part, ringing temple bells, bells at home, bicycle bells, car horns to call for an end to conflict and violence. "Whoever wins or loses, the most affected by conflict are children, we want to draw the Nepali public's attention to the plight of children," the coalition says in a statement. Information about the bell-ringing campaign is being broadcast on Radio Nepal, television stations and a network of FM stations throughout the country.



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BIZ NEWS

Upper Karnali

Nepal and India have agreed to jointly develop the 300MW Upper Karnali hydropower project. A team from India's state-owned National Hydroelectric Power Corporation is returning next month for a site study in western Nepal. "By December, we must start work at the site," NHPC's Yogendra Prasad told us. "We intend to complete the project in five years." Already, there are hints of disagreement. Nepal's Department of Electricity Development say NHPC will be required to prepare a detailed project report of the 600MW Budhi Gandaki storage type project as a pre-condition for developing Upper Karnali. NHPC's Prasad denies this: "There is no such condition, very soon we will be signing an Memorandum of Understanding on Upper Karnali."

NHPC also constructed the 14.3MW Devghat power plant in 1993 and the 60MW Kuchu project in Bhutan. The Indian company says it can generate electricity at five cents per unit for the Upper Karnali.

If the project goes ahead, NHPC will sell electricity to India's National Power Trading Corporation, or to states bordering Nepal. "Selling the power will not be a problem at all," says Prasad. But that is precisely what stalled a 750MW Nepal-Australian joint venture reservoir project on the West Seti for the past six years. Eurorient, an American company, gave up the 402MW Arun III project just because it could not strike a deal with India. The now bankrupt Enron Corp, another American company, too was unable to sign the PPA with India for the development of the 10,800MW Karnali Chisapani hydropower project.

Laurels

Nepal Investment Bank (NIB) this week earned the distinction of being the first Nepali-managed bank to win the prestigious 'Bank of the Year 2003' award from the London-based Financial Times Group's *The Banker*. The award is based on growth and performance in terms of capital, assets, return on equity, management quality and use of technology. The best banks in 140 countries and further categories dedicated to excellence and innovation every year are recognised.



Sturdy ride

The mountaineer Appa Sherpa was introduced as the brand ambassador for Yamaha Libero motorcycles this week. Yamaha dubbed Sherpa a 'Mileage' mountaineer for his extraordinary feat of summiting Mt Everest a record 13 times, to draw parallels with the 'Mileage' bike that is capable of stretching one litre of fuel over 85 Himalayan km. The 4 stroke, 106cc, advance engine bike is available in four colours at Morang Auto works, the sole distributor for the company.

NEW PRODUCTS

PEARLY WHITES: After 13 years of manufacturing Pearl toothbrushes, RB Brush Industries is making the next logical move to toothpastes and gels. Pearl Plus dental cream and Pearl Gel will be available in 50g tubes for Rs 16 and Rs 22 respectively.

SCENT OF A MAN: The Nepali male has no excuse for not smelling divine during Dasai with Hugo Boss' new cologne Baldessarini in the market. The scent is subtle and effective, what the fashion house likes to call "a pathchouli homage to ultra contemporary masculinity" and is available at all better department stores and perfumeries. The company assures us that just a dab will separate the men from the boys.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

In the Club



Looking at Nepal's future with the WTO.

While the political parties were out courting arrest around Tundikhel, Nepal became a WTO member. It made this Beed wonder whether a ruling multiparty government prone to party antics would have made our entry into The Club with so little fuss. To all intents and purposes, it seemed we Nepalis left it to divine intervention through Lord Pashupatinath for this membership. So rarely has there been so little public debate on a subject of such importance to the national economy. Even the Maoist leadership had little to say about Nepal embracing the free market.

Although developing countries put up a formidable fight at Cancun to slow the sweeping processes, it looks like business as usual. The US and EU will have it their way and we should not labour under the illusion that the G-21 will rule. Like the dozens of international agreements that Nepal is part of, once again we concentrated more on getting our name on the dotted line than on judging how to make WTO membership work for us. While we all laud the efforts of some of the champions within the government bureaucracy who worked towards

brokering the best deal for us, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Rather than looking at what we stand to lose by our alliance with the WTO, let's examine where we have the competitive advantage to exploit it. As the Beed is tired of pointing out, having a market of a billion people each to the north and

way flow. We may face a deluge of Belgian ghui, Australian apples and Indian medicos but there must be a reverse process too. The world should also see more of Nepali tea, garments, carpets and every other industry that has been flailing so desperately for the last five years.

The Beed doubts that we will have much of a say on WTO issues like farm subsidies and liberalising markets. Perhaps we need to be proactive toward implementing the agreed upon actions. This means getting more than 50 pieces of legislation amended or introduced, changing the way government machinery like the Customs Department functions, introducing quality controls and other standards.

Now is the time for our multilateral and bilateral partners to prove their genuine interest in the future of our country. A first step could be to take time off



south of us and not being able to find a niche is strange. We should have been much better by now at inviting foreign capital and technology to utilise our natural resources and labour.

The Nepali economy post-Cancun will not remain the same. The floodgates are opening and it is partially up to us to use every advantage to make trade a two-

from issues like 'conflict resolution' and focus on opening up the service sectors that have been well protected for Nepali players. There has been immense resistance from the private sector to opening businesses that are reserved for small-scale industries like handicrafts in Nepal. ♦

arthabeed@yahoo.com

NEPALI PAN

by NEETA POKHREL

Old boys' network

Our ageist society just doesn't get it: years do not add up to expertise.



In the West, governments are grappling with the enormous socio-economic impact of an ageing population. Society is battling the need to get the elderly back into the workforce so they can be productive in retirement.

However, it is with pride and amazement, that I observe this isn't the case in Nepal. Here, elderly people—elderly men to be more precise—still form the majority of the workforce, the political establishment and the bureaucracy. Defying all international norms, they are at the forefront of our society, calling all of the shots because of the traditional veneration for older people here. It is the young who have no clout and connection

in Nepal.

Now, how did we manage to get to this point? It is a *grand design* cunningly plotted and practiced over centuries by grey-haired conspirators from all sections of society. From Baluwatar to Singha Darbar, to corporations and consulting firms, the elderly hold court. The head office of this vast old boys' club is the planning commission which discreetly pumps millions of rupees every year into crafting and strengthening the ring fence that no one less-than-50 can break into.

International do-gooders, the INGOs and multilaterals, aren't lagging behind in promoting this cronyism of the elderly either. Recently, one of them

signed a team of consultants for a project, it had an average age of 57. Thanks to strategically developed and refined specifications, no one with less than a zillion years' experience can get in.

A young adviser in Nepal is an oxymoron, we are told. You might as well buy a grey wig and a stomach pillow to be taken seriously. Our ageist society just doesn't get it: years do not add up to expertise. Older is not necessarily wiser. The age-old exhortation to 'listen to your elders' is taken too literally here.

Look at the policy development settings, places where rules are made and grand designs plotted, like a national-level brainstorming workshop that I recently

attended on an important public commodity. The decent sized hall was packed to the rafters with grizzled men in the autumn of their lives. Did I overlook the age-criteria on the invitation letter? Are these the representatives of a predominantly young nation in which a majority is below 40? On my way out, I bumped into the delighted organisers, happy at the froth that they churned out.

Where is the young crowd? There is no sign of the 30-something professionals in Nepal. Maybe they are all out in the hinterland fighting each other, or perhaps young Nepalis are all in the Gulf and Malaysia toiling to send

money home. Or is it that in Nepal mid-life crisis sets in much earlier because our average life expectancy is 55 and they are all moping at home? In any case, one must admire those superior minds in whose hands we have bestowed the destiny of our country.

Now here's a business proposal to our planning commission and the rest of the gang heads: instead of twiddling their thumbs with nothing to plan in a country that has turned into a battlefield, they could all set up consultancies to advise Western countries on how to make more productive use of their ageing populations. ♦



Carmandu



MIN BAURACHARYA

The first cars brought into the Valley had to be carried in by armies of porters over Bhimphedi from the plains. The fuel also had to be ferried over the mountains by humans.

Things have improved, but sometimes when landslides block the capital's arteries for weeks on end or when there's a three day bandh, it seems we are back in the 1920s. Nevertheless, there has been a tremendous boom in the automobile market in Nepal in the past five years. Once toys of the rich and famous, cars today are becoming a necessity for the urban middle class Nepali as they seriously consider graduating from two-wheeler to four-wheeler. There is a whole range of vehicles and bank financing now available to suit every ego and every pocket.

Foreign car manufacturers from India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Europe are all represented here, attracted by the increased purchasing power of Nepali urbanites. Matched quite fortuitously with the mushrooming of banks, there is now a burst of car finance loans that put motor vehicles within the reach of far more people than previously. With other avenues of investment almost closed, banks are investing in hire and purchase schemes for cars.

Customers are eligible for a loan if their income meets a

bank's Equal Monthly Installment. They have to make a 20 percent downpayment while bank puts up the rest. Payment periods vary from 12-60 months and banks will finance vehicles between Rs 300,000 to 5 million at an interest of 9.5-10.5 percent.

The bad news is that this trend has reduced the resale value of cars and the second-hand market. Five years ago, most buyers opted for reconditioned, today they go for airconditioned. Most shoot straight for brand new cars, usually minis. "In the old days, almost everyone went for reconditioned cars," says Pashupati Rajbhandari of International Auto Way Centre. "Those were the days when you used to get Japanese domestic models that were almost good as new."

The import ban on reconditioned cars and a heavy tax on those more than 20 years old gave the market for new cars a jump start. "People began to worry that the government would one day ban old vehicles altogether, making new cars a safer bet," Rajbhandari recalls. The number of cars in the city has gone up from 23,050 in 1990 to 66,395 in 2003, although registered new cars are down this year to 2,906 from 5,261 in 1995.

Car owners' experience in the last few years show spare parts for cars with a bigger production scale are readily available. "The price varies with the kind of configuration you demand in a car," says Rohini Thapaliya, President of Nepal Automobile Dealers Association. "But the choice finally depends on the availability of genuine parts and after-sales service."

There are always exceptions. Brand loyalty is strong, and people will invest in a second-hand car with good resale value. Despite the seeming proliferation of fuel-guzzling SUVs, big cars have almost no market in the country, except for the super rich, foreign-aid projects and embassies. From market trends and from a casual assessment at any traffic jam, it does seem compacts are here to stay.

As a service to readers, *Nepali Times* got a team to test drive some of the models available, and frankly assess their performance and value. SUVs are reviewed below, sedans on pages 8-9 and small cars on page 10.



Test drivers: Gyan Amerasinghe, Area Manager Nepal for Qatar Airways and fellow Kathmandu-based Sri Lankan, Aruni John from the Panos Institute South Asia, took our lineup of big and beautiful SUVs on test drives in Gorkarna last week.

Swell SUVs



Honda CRV ★★★★★

Oooh, if ever big was beautiful, this is it. With 150 BHP, the 2-litre engine has 'ivtech' that is ideal for Nepali highways. The CRV has very impressive suspension and road hugging capability. Safety features include all four disc brakes with ABS and airbags for both passenger and driver. The CRV has a dashboard-based automatic transmission system with a new real-time four-wheel technology. The CRV is ideal for family outdoor activities what with a convertible table and a water bucket in the luggage area.

Rs 3,980,000

Hyundai Santa Fe ★★★★★

"Experience the freedom," say Hyundai about their Santa FE. And the freedom of driving this wonderfully responsive full time 4WD diesel vehicle over rough edges is a treat. Absolutely noiseless, this machine ensures a smooth ride over the roughest terrain Nepal can throw at you. The double differential unit ensures a 60:40 torque distribution between the front and rear axles for maximum stability and traction, ensuring that the Santa Fe holds on to the asphalt as if it was stuck to it. This is an economical, neat and compact SUV but it could do with some improvement in the interior design department.

Rs 3,551,000

Hyundai Terracan ★★

Perhaps the ideal 'project vehicle' for Nepal, the Terracan is best for heavy work and transportation requirements. With a 2.5 litre turbo charged diesel engine, this 7-seater workhorse is not a full time 4WD but it is one tough cookie. A pity that the makers didn't pay as much attention

to the inside. If you're really keen to drive off into the wild blue yonder, don't leave without the indispensable GPS navigation system. The Terracan's recent launch south of the border means we won't have to worry about spare part replacements unlike other direct imports.

Rs 3,758,000

Suzuki Grand Vitara ★★★★★

The compact size of the Grand Vitara brings this in line with the RAV 4 and CRV in compatibility with the average road in the Valley. If you're buying a manual Grand Vitara, make sure you build up some upper body strength so you can get used to the gear shift. A petrol part time 4WD SUV, the Vitara has a good combination of safety and luxury features. A classy interior showcases this 2 litre engine to perfection. The Grand Vitara has ABS, a good turning circle and road holding.

Rs 3,500,000.

Toyota RAV 4 ★★★★★

The hugely popular RAV 4 could have been designed with Nepali roads in mind. This full-time 4WD with a 2 litre engine has plenty of grunt and gives a real sense of control. Road grip is good with excellent suspension, this is a reliable, comfortable and durable car, although slightly on the squat side. At 148 BHP the RAV 4 has a very smooth and powerful engine. Options include wireless door lock, ABS, Radio/CD with 4 speaker system, key safety features like airbag for both passenger and driver and a rear window de-fogger. The interior and exterior styling complement each other perfectly, making this a very different product from the first generation of the Toyota RAV 4's. You've come a long way, baby!

Rs 4,200,000



KIA Sorrento ★★★★★

The devil is in the details and the interiors of this SUV would get full marks from Beelzebub himself: leather seats, a six-speaker audio system, LCD odometer and trip meter, overhead console plus back and rear center armrests and power-controlled seats with a control panel on the wheel. I could almost live in this car. The Sorrento's 2.5 litre diesel engine with 140 BHP is a part time 4WD CDRI translates into 30 percent more power than other diesel engines, with 50 percent less noise and pollution. A beautifully smooth SUV with four disc brakes with ABS and EBS, but a slightly constricting turning radius. Considering the luxury features on offer with 25 options including a sunroof for maximum mountain vantage, the Sorrento is value for money.

Rs 3,710,000

Mahindra & Mahindra Scorpio ★★★

The Scorpio suits the rugged terrain of Mustang or Zanskar more than Kathmandu Valley, but at the rate our roads are deteriorating, its time may have come. Clearly in a category all of its own, the Scorpio has a 2.6 litre turbo engine and is built like a tank. With 109 BHP this seven seater has all four disc brakes and a decent interior, and with a tag less than its Japanese and Korean cousins, the Scorpio is good value. Pack the tent and the sleeping bags and take that dirt track that heads straight up the mountains from the Prithibi Highway.

Rs 2,600,000

Sedans and



Test Driver: Srijana Prasai is the sales manager of Korean Air and Emirates. She has bought a Kia Rio, is partial to Toyota but aspires to a Mazda6.



Tata Indigo ★★

The ambitious 1.4 diesel turbo charged engine is not a joyride and the plastic interiors did nothing to alleviate my woes. The diesel engine won't burn a hole in your wallet but the pick-up had me gnashing my teeth—one doesn't enjoy being overtaken by *Safa tempos*. With great difficulty, it gained momentum and hit 40km/h in third gear. I was almost smiling but it was back to second gear with another determined tempo cutting across from the wrong side. The clutch had a jack-in-the-box personality—every time I floored it, the pedal sprang back somewhat viciously. With 160mm of ground clearance there's plenty of room underneath but it's what on top that matters.
Rs 1,650,000 (Full option)

Fiat Sienna 1.6 ELX 4 ★★★

With an army of initials marching behind its name, this 16 valve, 4 cylinder implemented Italian car takes a whole lot of muscle to manoeuvre. It weighs approximately 100kg more than other cars and it resists the driver. I barely felt the power steering and after 15 minutes behind the wheel the old triceps earned a free workout. The big blessing of the Sienna is the phenomenal 220mm ground clearance, which is just the ticket when you find riverbed scree where there once used to be a road. Despite the Italian engine and gearbox, this car had more rough edges than suitable for a sedan. The Rs 1,850,000 (semi-option) price tag is way too much for this assembled *gaddi*.



Ford Ikon 1.6 Zxi ★★★

It was not the inability to glance furtively at the side-view mirror to ensure that my mascara was in place that irked me but the fact that the Ford Ikon 1.6 Zxi did not come equipped with automatic mirror adjusters. For a 1600cc car the pick-up wasn't great, maybe it had something to do with the powerful a/c gulping gas. The central locking, power steering and electronic fuel cap release worked well but one tends to take these as a given. Front leg-room was spacious enough and the instrument panel came armed with white reflectors yet the interior was tacky. The 45l fuel tank gave a decent 10km in the Valley but Rs 1,875,000 is rather steep for an Indian-assembled car with frumpish insides.

Kia Rio ★★★

It rattles and hums. The trunk door reminds you every now and then that it is a Kia: it canters and almost starts a little gallop, but take the Rio up any Ring Road incline and the pick-up dwindles, more so if you're cruising with the a/c on high. There is a fine line between cabin comfort and more revs when you put the pedal to the metal. It's easy to be kind to the 1300cc Rio, even with an exterior faintly reminiscent of a station wagon, hence the abundant trunk space. Pity about the ground clearance though. Any pothole could unhinge the bottom off this baby.
Rs 1,529,000



Opel Corsa Sail ★★★

Opel deserve full marks for this hatchback design concept. The combination of a lightweight body and modern mechanical engineering delivers thrust throughout the rev range. The fuel efficiency is a noteworthy 10.6km/l and it's a cinch to park in narrow spaces. The Opel's McPherson strut front suspension gives it leverage compounded by the rear torsional stabiliser. Don't let the size fool you, this dinky lil' auto is revving to go.
Rs 1,390,000



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the single girl



Hyundai Matrix ★★★★★

The 1.614 DOH Hyundai Matrix fits right into the narrow bylanes of this overcrowded city. The interior is surprisingly large and spacious with ample head-space for tall people. The sturdy coil spring suspension is good enough to make the coffee holder actually do its job without spillages. The nouveau style body is very now and the elevation and wide windscreen made me feel like I was driving a mini SUV. The foldable rear-seats create enough space for a carsick dog and a baby pram.
Rs 1,899,700

Nissan Sunny 1.6

Super Luxury ★★★★★

A mouthful of a name that easily spells l-u-x-u-r-y. The gear transmission is smooth and even with the a/c on full, the pick-up is effortless and gives about 11km/l on our roads. Cushioning every bump, the shock absorbers are unique and the modified QG engine provided ample levels of mid-range torque for smooth acceleration. Narrow spaces do not compromise the Super Saloon as it comes furnished with remote control folding narrow mirrors. Spacious trunk, excellent manoeuvrability and glittering side-turn signal lamps are features that put the Sunny into a class of its own.
Rs 2,350,000



Honda Civic ★★★★★

Maintaining its advanced status, the 1.5 transversely mounted SOHC 16 valve Civic has an edge over other sedans. The high levels of refinement and spaciousness keep it from looking and handling like a bulky roadrunner. Vamped with EPS (Electric Power Steering) and ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) the Civic guards against skids and slides. This is a wonderfully responsive car and the brakes are sharp. Admittedly, Rs 2,600,000 is exorbitant but trust me, it's worth it.



Toyota Echo ★★★★★

Very high tech, the Japanese have outdone themselves again. This 1300cc four door mini sedan is extraordinary. Rigged with the VVT-I engine exclusive only to Toyota, they have taken pains with every detail. The interior is spacious and unique with its trendy digital instrument display panel. The pick-up is amazing. Designed for the European market, the Echo certainly has style. The asking price of Rs 2,195,000 for this funky car is a fair price: after all it's a Toyota. Put together a simple yet substantial design with advanced technology and Toyota know-how and *voilà!* It's an Echo.



Toyota Corolla ★★★★★

Plush interiors, minute attention to detail, superb latent safety features and you must be sitting behind the wheel of a Toyota Corolla. This 4 door Xli sedan also has the VVT-I engine. Big without being bulky, sleek without appearing like a pimpmobile, the Corolla updates it's old skool credibility with new age sensibility. Rs 2,590,000 sounds extravagant but it's a small price to pay for a car that doesn't cut corners when it comes to quality. The Corolla's 160mm ground clearance and fuel efficiency of 12km/l had me humming along with the engine.

Mazda6 ★★★★★

Little wonder that the Mazda6 2000cc was the winner of Japan's RJC Car of the Year. Fitted with a DOHC 16 valve engine, it is a truly exciting car to drive. This is what other cars should aspire to be. I barely felt the numerous potholes—the high mount double wishbone suspension in the front and E-type multi links suspension at the rear ensured the smoothest drive possible. The gear transmission is effortless and clears from zero on the second gear. The brake response time is faultless, making this a great ride either in the city or on the highways. With an engine that makes most car lovers salivate, the exterior and interior of the car is just as gorgeous. The Mazda6 is a true beauty and would turn heads anywhere in the world. Priced at Rs 2,896,000, the Mazda6 is far too expensive for most of us but, with due apologies to Browning, a girl's reach should always exceed her grasp, or what's a heaven for?



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Small cars and the modern man



Test Driver: Mandil Pradhan is the founder of PartyNepal.com. He drives a white Maruti 800 (1995) but he'd swap it any day for a Fiat Palio.



Maruti 800 Std ★★★

The Maruti 800 is the most common compact in the Valley for a very good reason: it's cheap and takes all the punishment that our roads dole out. The 800cc engine is just right for the Kathmandu streets and mileage is a healthy 15km/l. The 800's economical price tag, readily available spare parts that are often cheaper than those of two wheelers and good resale value mean that it's a popular brand. For that price you can't expect power and comfort options but this little compact is manoeuvrable and parkable and has a sound pick-up with enough ground clearance for the ever-present potholes. The most frustrating and embarrassing part of driving your own hard-earned 800, is when strangers hail you with a "TAXI!"
Rs 739,200

Maruti Zen LX ★★★

Overall not very different from the 800 as far as handling goes, the Zen looks sleeker and has 200cc over its sibling. The interior is smarter but the difference in performance and extra features is hardly noticeable. Maruti has attempted to jazz up the insides but hasn't really succeeded with the use of cheap plastic and rough finishing. Comparatively higher priced, the spare parts for the Zen are also slightly more expensive. I'd stick to the evergreen 800.
Rs 974,600



Maruti Alto LX ★★

Performance and specifications wise, the Alto is very similar to the Zen but is a better looking and more comfortable car to drive. The bigger dashboard has a lot more room and the compartment is larger. The interiors are more elegant with the option of front power windows. In the end, however, this is yet another spin-off of the basic 800.
Rs 898,700

Suzuki Ignis ★★★★★

This multi-compact with SUV features from Suzuki Japan has everything: a superb interior, smooth gear transmission, factory fitted cassette/CD player, central and remote locking system, a/c and power windows. The quality of construction is almost flawless. Drivability is further strengthened by power steering, rear wiper and defogger and it has enough room for five. Hi-tech suspension takes care of the bumpy roads. The Ignis has airbags in the front seats and side impact beams on the doors. With a choice of a 4wd and a 2wd and seven different shades, this is what I would pick. If I had the cash.
Rs 2,195,000



Hyundai Santro

Zip Plus ★★★★★

As far as Indian minis are concerned, the Santro is top of the line. High quality plastic, moulded switches and the refined interior lend an air of quality. The spacious dashboard, cabin room and extra trunk space would come in handy for any city driver. Manoeuvrability is aided by a very small turning radius and the slightly elevated seating helps for a better view while driving. With its Coke can look, the exterior could use a little help. The new Santro Xing is expected soon.
Rs 1,270,500



Fiat Palio 1.2 ELX ★★★★★

This car has pedigree: assembled in India, its engine, microprocessor and gear box come from Italy and almost everything else is from Brazil. Great drivability that makes it glide over potholes. The sturdy Italian-style interior compares with bigger cars. Almost zero engine noise inside, excellent handling and road grip at high speeds. No surprise that the Palio comes from the makers of the world's best cars, Ferrari. Along with the usual features it also has an inertial fuel cut-off switch which interrupts fuel supply in the event of a collision. Road visibility from the driver's seat is a problem because of the bulbous front.
Rs 1,444,000 (Full option)



Daihatsu Sirion ★★★★★

The Daihatsu Sirion is a comfortable car to drive. The high seat position made me feel totally in control, the acceleration is phenomenal for a 1000cc car and the fuel economy is excellent. Backed up by power steering, electric door mirror, power windows, central lock, dual airbag system, rear wiper and defogger this is one of the most affordable Japanese cars. Equally good for the rough *gallis* as it is for the highways.
Rs 1,525,000



Daihatsu Charade ★★★

Smaller than the Sirion but with virtually all of the same features. The slightly taller cabins are a little congested and the smaller tyre radius reduces ground clearance. The interiors look better than the Sirion and there are headrests on all four seats. Between the two in the Daihatsu stable, and given the price differential, I'd opt for a Sirion.
Rs 1,475,000



Tata Indica V2 (Diesel) ★★

With great exterior styling, the Tata Indica is an attractive hatchback with high ground clearance. This fuel-efficient machine has a huge cabin with a foldable back seat that massively increases the trunk space. The Indica's gearshift takes practice and the car doesn't cope with bumpy streets very well. The plastic used in the interior feels cheap and the pick-up is sluggish. The noise level has always been the Indica's biggest demerit but then again, it is a diesel engine.
Rs 1,317,000 (Full option including insurance and 1 year road tax)

Perodua 2003 ★★★

This is a real value for money mini. This 850cc Malaysian car with a Japanese engine boasts 17km/l in the city. Handling the Perodua is easy owing to its size. It is so light, the wheel felt as if it had power steering. The pick-up simply outclasses other cars in its engine size. The one disadvantage of such a light car is a slight wobble at high speeds. Shifting between second and third gear takes a little getting used to because it catches.
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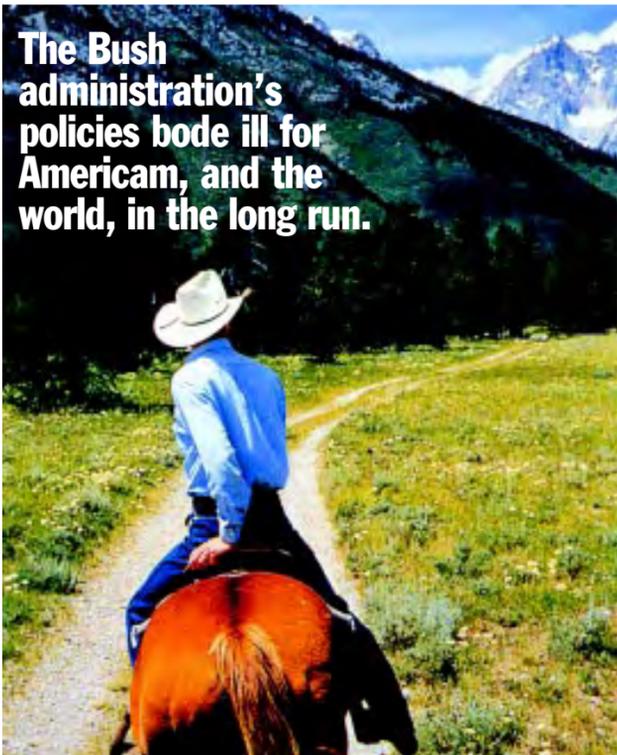
COMMENT

by JOSEPH E STIGLITZ



The Lone Ranger

The Bush administration's policies bode ill for America, and the world, in the long run.



In 2001, President George W Bush misled the American people. He said that a tax cut that was not designed to stimulate the economy would stimulate it, and the American people believed him. But it did not. He told Americans that the large surpluses that were among President Bill Clinton's legacies meant that the US could afford to cut taxes massively. Wrong again. He did not warn Americans how dubious such estimates can be.

In 2003 President Bush misled the American people about the economy once more. Weeks after persuading Congress to pass another tax cut—in some ways even more inequitable than the first—his administration revealed how bad the fiscal position had become. The \$230 billion surplus inherited from Clinton had turned into a \$450 billion deficit.

Now, after handing billions to rich Americans through tax cuts that

almost exclusively benefit them, the Bush administration is passing the hat around, asking for contributions from other countries to help pay for the cost of the Iraq war. Even setting aside the other dubious aspects of Bush's Iraq policy, the conjunction of misguided giveaways to America's richest people with an international US begging bowl is hardly likely to evoke an outpouring of sympathy.

Meanwhile, as all of this happens, the US trade deficit mounts. America, the world's richest country, evidently can't live within its means, borrowing more than a billion dollars a day. As the US thrashes around for someone to blame, it was inevitable that it would focus on China, with its large trade surplus, just as the twin fiscal and trade deficits of the Reagan era led to a focus on Japan two decades ago.

But this is blame shifting, nothing more. America's fiscal and trade deficits are intimately linked. If a country saves less than it invests, it

must borrow the difference from abroad, and foreign borrowing and trade deficits are two sides of the same coin.

Some people abroad now tend to gloat at America's problems. For many, it is another reason to question America's ability to provide effective leadership. It took America a dozen years to work its way out of Reagan's fiscal mess. It may take just as long to clean up the mess Bush has created.

But non-Americans' *Schadenfreude* is misguided. Globalisation means that mistakes in one country—especially in the world's largest economy—have powerful repercussions elsewhere. Three things are worth noting here. First, America's deficits are certain to sop up vast amounts of the world's pool of savings. But the world will recover eventually from its current slowdown, and that shortage of savings will become important. It will mean higher real interest rates, lower investment and lower growth, all of which will be especially costly for developing countries.

Second, America's huge trade deficit may be a major source of global instability. Will the world continue to

finance this deficit willingly, to put its money into a country with such a demonstrated lack of competence in macroeconomic management (to say nothing of the corporate, banking and accounting scandals)? What returns will they demand?

In searching for others to blame, America may once again enter an era of protectionism, as it did under Reagan. Bush may trumpet free markets, just as Reagan did. But just as he may exceed Reagan in fiscal irresponsibility, so he may outflank Reagan in trade hypocrisy.

The Bush administration has pushed forward tax cuts that lead to deficits while providing only a modest amount of stimulus. Equally worrying—both for America and the world—is the path on which it has embarked: deficits as far as the eye can see. The Bush administration's policies bode ill for America in the long run—and hence for the world. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University.

Linking suicide

TOKYO – Japan, a suicide-prone country, is grappling with a new trend—a spate of Internet-related suicides linked to websites where young people who are total strangers can contact one another to plan their deaths. The latest incident was reported in May, when a 24-year-old man and two women, 23 and 20, met for the first - and last time at a train station, got into a car together and drove to a wooded area where they asphyxiated themselves. The Japanese media reported they had used a suicide website. A letter left by the man in the car revealed they had become acquainted for one reason, they "just wanted to die together, nothing else". (IPS)

Read the label

CANBERRA – In a world first, the Australian government has responded to pressure from a staunch Catholic senator and agreed to require the labelling of pharmaceutical products that were developed with the use of embryos or embryonic stem cells. The decision represents a major defeat for the pharmaceutical industry, which lobbied heavily against Senator Brian Harradine's proposal. In its submission on the Harradine draft proposal, the drug industry went so far as to warn the government's drug regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), against even considering ethical issues. (IPS)

Wanted: foreign grooms

HO CHI MINH CITY – Although many of the marriages take place after some introduction and genuine relationships, wife-selection rackets have been uncovered in this Vietnamese city. Reports showed that many girls born from poor families in the Mekong Delta still believe that marrying a foreigner is their only chance of solving familial financial problems. Each selected girl will receive around \$1,000 to give to her parents, of which the matchmaker pockets a substantial cut.

The government has banned any agency that matches foreigners with Vietnamese, but allows some 'acquaintance clubs' founded by the printing media and social organisations help local singles to get together. (IPS)

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Crocodile tears

Daman Nath Dhungana in *Mulyankan* Sep-Oct 2003

There are ten reasons the talks failed:

1. We still don't know what was agreed in the first round of talks in November 2001, who had agreed to what and whether these agreements were fulfilled.
2. There was no sense of urgency or seriousness about setting up a Code of Conduct monitoring committee.
3. We still don't know why or on whose instructions the army reneged on the agreement on the five km limit.
4. His Majesty added two more facilitators to Padma Ratnaji and myself, which no one was comfortable with. From my point of view, our role was limited and made ineffective.
5. The Maoist side repeatedly raised the issue of direct talks with the king, rather than with a government with or without executive powers. But there wasn't even a public response to this.
6. The Thapa government's negotiating team in Nepalganj was not just a formality, but its concept paper did not give the Maoists the concessions to stay on in talks. They warned about this repeatedly.
7. While the talks were going on in Hapure, the Maoists alleged in a letter that the army executed their political workers deliberately in order to sabotage the talks. The Maoist leadership then decided there was no point continuing with

bargaining over constituent assembly.

8. Aside from the proposal from us facilitators on 17 August about widening our role, we were reduced to being spectators in the talks. After the deadlock on 19 August, we proposed that both sides take time to re-evaluate their positions.
9. But both sides went home and raised the level of their rhetoric. The government side was rigid on the constituent assembly demand in a situation of militarisation. And both sides started blatantly breaking the ceasefire and the assassination campaign began.
10. Those who should have helped protect the ceasefire didn't, and tried their best to make our jobs difficult. The same people are now shedding crocodile tears. With foreigners now calling the shots, I don't know whether talks will ever succeed. But this much I can say: for the peace process to succeed you need a government and state party that is serious about negotiations and one that can muster the national consensus for it. I realised this time what a big difference there is between negotiations held while parliament is in session and while it is not.



Killer instinct

UML leader Modnath Prashrit in *Kantipur*, 13 September

कान्तिपुर

For years, supporters of the old regime have been trying to protect its existence by hook or by crook. But now, even those who claim to be creators of the new regime are slaughtering Nepalis. They are beheading people, planting booby traps at schools, roads and public places. They are killing and maiming people. Is this the revolution Marx and Lenin talked about?

What kind of political movement is this that believes its expansion is possible only after it kills political activists of other parties, kills teachers and turns schools into death zones? What kind of revolution will such a party attain? What kind of nation would such a revolution make? And what kind of justice can the people expect?

"Plant bombs wherever possible. Kill people and spread panic, only then will the government lose and we will win," seems to be the Maoist credo. What an easy-going attitude towards human life. And these are the people who talk about building a new Nepal! What a gory thought. How bizarre to believe that you can erect the golden staircase of revolution on a mass grave.

I wish I was killed and not 12-year-old Deepak Gurung, I am 63 year old and it is downhill from here in terms of my contribution to society. The Maoists in Nepal have been following Mao's cultural revolution as their role model. But they have overtaken Charu Majumdar when it comes to Naxalite fundamentalism. Majumdar at least had rules about eliminating class enemies. An anti-people person



Maoists tied journalist Gyanendra Khadka to a volleyball post and slit his throat in Jyamire, Sindhupalchok on 7 September.

would first be blacklisted, then the party committee would ratify the selection and under the instruction of the party's chief, the military unit would be deployed to execute the person. With their random and arbitrary assassination campaign, Nepali Maoists have overtaken Indian Maoists. They are not bothered who is killed in their ambushes and blasts. They have descended to the nadir of radical terrorism.

There appears to be a widening gap between the ideology of the leadership and the lower rungs. When they came aboveground, the Maoist leadership promised the business community they would support the free market system. At the same time they even praised the economic reforms in China, and said they would struggle against the Americans who were trying to destroy China by establishing bases in Nepal. Suddenly, they have now gone back to the cultural revolution as their

guiding principle. We see a great contradiction between rhetoric and behaviour within the Maoist fold. If they go on like this they will not just threaten our existence as political entities but also that of our nation.

No cranes

Rajdhani, 15 September

राजधानी

For decades, Siberian cranes have stopped in Mahotari on their migration route from Siberia to India. But their numbers are falling rapidly because of pesticides. About 500 Siberian cranes have died here in the last year, especially in Gausala VDC. Farmers spray pesticides like DDT, phosphorus and Metacid on their crops and the cranes feed on insects and pests exposed to the chemicals. There can be anything between 7,000-17,000 cranes passing through or nesting here every year.



Royal Assembly. Parliamentary Assembly. Constituent Assembly. Funeral Assembly.

विमल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-17 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We have not had any response from the King and the Maoists to restart talks.

Sundar Mani Dixit in *BBC Nepali Service* on 17 September.

What was her fault?

Madhab Dhungel in *Kantipur*, 15 September

कान्तिपुर

Seven-year-old Bhabana was a hardworking third grade student. This year she won Rs 300 for topping her class. It was on the evening of 9 September, Bhabana was playing outside her home in Kalaun, 20km south of Patan, when a grenade killed her. Earlier that day four Maoists and their local commander, Saroj, were returning from Bhattedara and stopped near the ropeway terminal for some food and alcohol. By the time they reached Kalaun, Dilip, the bomb specialist, was roaring drunk. They stopped for lunch at Baburam Maharjan's shop where Dilip decided to teach his junior comrades how to use a grenade. He pulled the pin and threw the grenade out of the shop. The shopkeeper was showered with shrapnel but Bhabana, who was running towards her mother, was cut to pieces.

In the ensuing confusion, Dilip escaped. Although he got away, the villagers managed to detain his two comrades, Saroj and Prabin. By the time the local Maoist administrator Bhim Dwoj arrived, more than 150 villagers had gathered. Dwoj dismissed the incident as trivial. Incensed villagers tied up the Maoists and beat them up. They were so angry that they even turned on bystanders who urged restraint.

Dwoj left after saying he would bring Dilip along with local Maoist government chief Ram Kumar Syangtang alias 'Bikash' and the district secretary. The people released the Maoists after they signed a paper that acknowledged their error. It read: "An accident occurred due to our technical error. We shall give compensation. We shall return to help the family in the cremation."

But the next day the Maoists returned, threatening to kill one by one those who had spoken against them. That same night Rajkumar Darlami, his father and brothers from Kalaun were abducted. Rajkumar managed to escape, but the whereabouts of his father and brothers is not known.

Many Bhabanas are dying every day in Nepal. If her death on the outskirts of the city received so little media attention, we can only imagine what atrocities are going unreported every day. Instead of punishing their activists responsible for the death of a young child, the Maoists returned to her village to abduct and threaten the people who asked for justice. Their impunity will only make people more supportive of the government tagging the Maoists as terrorists. Prachandas and Baburams have to realise that the fathers of all Bhabanas will be living in this country for a long time yet.



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Yeti Travel Vs. Marco Polo Travels
Specialized Travels Vs. Shangrila Tours
Hotel Shangri-la Vs. Arun Intercontinental traders
Him FM Vs. Khetan Group
Bardes Nepal Vs. Amartya Group

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **A day in Lazimpat** Photographs by Damien Murphy at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Monsoon Moods** Paintings by Uttam Nepali, Shashi Shah, Batsa Gopal Vaidya, Shashikala Tiwari, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4411122
- ❖ **Water Colours** by Nepal Water Colour Society members from 22 September-11 October at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694

EVENTS

- ❖ **Film South Asia '03** 43 films screened back-to-back from 9.30 AM to 6.30 PM, 25-28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. Tickets: Rs 25 are available at Saraswati Book Centre (5521599), Mandala Book Point (4227711) Suwal Music and Video (4421522) and Dhokaima Café (5543017).
- ❖ **Lazimpat Film Show: Gandhi** (Ben Kingsley) 22 September 7PM, *Lagaan* 24 September 7PM Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Skool Disco Costume Party** 8PM on 20 September at Club Kilroy, Thamel. 4412821
- ❖ **Festive Mood** Last Friday theme event at Dwarika's Hotel on 26 September with Abhaya & The Steam Injuns. Rs 699 per person. 4479488.
- ❖ **Wavevent** *The Dark Path*, a play on street children by FSCN and WAVE in association with Sathsath. PTY LTD autograph session. Free tickets at the door. Food courtesy Hot Breads. 4PM on 21 September at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **Quest for Peace** painting workshop organised by UNDP and SPDI for International Day of Peace, 21 September. 10AM - 4PM at Patan Museum, Lalitpur.

MUSIC

- ❖ **PTY LTD** Australian house lounge band live at **Club Platinum** from 8PM on 21 September, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Tickets: Rs 1,000 - Rs 1,500 (inclusive of Rs 1,000 - 500 drink coupons). **Jatra**, Thamel on 24 September. The Enticer Deluxe **Lounge-A-Rama** at Hotel de l'Annapurna from 4PM till late on 26 September. Tickets: Rs 300. 4432583
- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30 PM Wednesday, Saturday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Thunderbolt** at Rox Bar on Fridays Happy Hours start 6PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Trio Kings** and **Steel Wheels** 70s rock on 12-13 September at Belle Momo, Darbar Marg. 4230890

DRINKS

- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Café Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Jyatha. 4250440

FOOD

- ❖ **Peking Duck** at Tien Shan, the Oriental restaurant at Shangri-la Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Sumptuous Sandwiches** from 21 September at all Hyatt Regency outlets. 4491234
- ❖ **Dasai and Tihar Bonanza** 50 percent off food at The Fun Café and Splash Bar & Grill. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4423888
- ❖ **Café U** Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5523236
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** introduces special sandwiches. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 4468008
- ❖ **Danran Restaurant** Japanese food at Pulchowk. 5521027
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialities** at Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **September Surrender** Breakfast, laundry, a massage and more for Rs 3,000 a night at Shangri-la Hotel, Kathmandu. 4412999
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com Website: www.escape2nepal.com
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With the rains receding, air pollution levels in the Valley are starting to climb. The average PM10 (particles below ten microns) concentration in Putali Sadak increased by 32 percent last week compared to the week ago. Even in the residential area of Thamel, the PM10 level was up by 17 percent. Heavy traffic areas such as Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital showed pollution levels above safe thresholds on five out of seven days last week. The only good news is that the three-day Nepal bandh will bring down air pollution. Last time we had a bandh, pollution levels went down by up to 30 percent.

Average PM10 levels at selected points in Kathmandu 9-16 September in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mape.gov.np

Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	>425

Putali Sadak	Matsyagaon	TU	Bhaktapur	Patan H.	Thamel
81	24	27	42	123	54

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

This satellite image taken on Wednesday afternoon shows high clouds all over the Himalaya and Indian plains. What this amounts to is more monsoon moisture for at least another week. We can expect short showers of moderate intensity, and days that go in-and-out with bright sunshine or localised rain. Western Nepal is getting above-normal rainfall, and this trend continues with another low-pressure circulation over northwestern India grazing the trans-Karnali. The tail-end of the monsoon may not be of any good to farmers, but they will keep the air pollution in check for a while longer.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
29-18	28-18	27-17	27-17	28-18

BOOKWORM



The Critique of the State Jens Bartelson
Cambridge University Press, 2001
Rs 1,272

What kind of political order would there be in the absence of the state? Bartelson argues that we are currently unable to imagine what might lurk 'beyond', because our basic concepts of political order are conditioned by our experience of statehood. In this study, he investigates the concepts of the state historically as well as philosophically, considering a range of thinkers and theories.

ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age Andre Gunder Frank
Vistaar Publications, 1998
Rs 896



In a bold challenge to received historiography and social theory, Frank turns on its head the world according to Marx, Weber and other theorists. Anyone interested in Asia, economic and social history, in international relations, in political economy and in socio-economic theory cannot afford to ignore this exciting reassessment of our global economic past and future.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@csl.com.np

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Bollywood gets bolder with **Boom**. Directed by Kaizad Gustad, it has a distinctly Tarantino and Guy Ritchie flavour, which will come as a refreshing change from the soft focus depictions so beloved to Bollywood. **Boom's** fast pace is complemented by the sensational music of Talvin Singh and Resul. The movie stars Amitabh Bachchan as the king pin, Gulshan Grover, Jackie Shroff, Javed Jaaferi, Zeenat Aman, Seema Biswas and Padma Lakshmi, Madhu Sapre, Katrina Kaif. With the buxom village lasses and sappy love stories shoved aside for an intricate plot that involves ganglords, Indian supermodels and a large cachet of diamonds, **Boom** blows away the old stereotypes.

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Curtain raiser

Film South Asia 2003 opens next week with a Nepali documentary on the principles of winning, losing and what it is worth.

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Pranay Limbu admits that he submitted his documentary on Kuber Rai, Nepal's lost *Adhunik* singer, for Film South Asia 2003 just for fun. He certainly didn't expect *Itihas Jitneharuko Lagi* (History for Winners) would be picked to open the South Asian documentary film festival next week.

Pranay is self-taught. He spent hours pouring over books borrowed from the British Council and TU, recorded award-winning movies and watched them with a critical eye, getting a feel for how the pros did it. In a modest little flat in the back streets of Putali Sadak, Pranay and some friends set up the production house, RBA Films. Each year, the group puts their savings towards a camera, computer, editing software. This year, he was finally ready to invest in a film on the award-winning musician, Kuber Rai. It took the 29-year-old six months of hard work to put together a no-frills production using a single camera.

The camera tracks down Kuber Rai digging his field in Ilam. That evening, in his home lit by the flickers of a kerosene lamp, we learn that Kuber is a brilliant vocalist, one who had bested even the popular Ram Krishna Dhakal in a competition in Kathmandu. Now, several years later, Kuber has enough songs to cut a record and wants to give music another try.

As Kuber's story unfolds in Kathmandu, each time accompanied by the sorrowful tune of a solitary violin, we're introduced to Dhiraj Rai, a budding pop star. He is everything that Kuber is not. Dhiraj has no qualms about pandering to the media and has



Kuber Rai back to tilling his field in the closing sequence of Pranay Limbu's documentary, *Itihas Jitneharuko Lagi*.

become an icon of modern youth culture. In an interview before he dashes off to a fashion show where he has been invited as the guest artist, Dhiraj admits there were times he thought of quitting, but he kept faith in his music and persevered for 12 years.

We become painfully aware of Kuber Rai's alienation in Kathmandu as he is shuttled from one music house to the next, each making empty promises. Arien Robin's lyrics sound clear: "I don't know what I am doing in this crazy city. I'm completely lost, confused." The newspapers stack up in Kuber's room, showing

the empty days going by. Sixteen days later, defeated, Kuber decides it's time to return to his fields in Ilam.

In Kathmandu the curtains rise for Dhiraj as he proclaims, "History is for winners."

History was intended for Nepali television. "I wanted to make this film for the Nepali masses. I want to encourage young people not to lose hope just because they may be financially weak," Pranay told us. "If you have the dream, go for it."

Film South Asia has been holding bi-annual documentary festivals in Kathmandu, and this

year 43 films from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka will be shown. Festival chairman, Kanak Mani Dixit, explains why Pranay's film was chosen to open this year's event: "First, *History for Winners* is a very well made film, and the alienation a villager feels in urban Kathmandu is a very powerful statement."

FSA 2003 will open on Thursday 25 September with a keynote address by Indian film director, Mahesh Bhatt, and will continue till 28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre. ♦

www.himalassociation.org/fsa



PTY LTD

Do the dance and make some noise with three Australian lads who are creating quite a stir with their debut album, *You Should Be Like This More Often*. Danny G, identical twins Tim Tainsh and Danny Tainsh make PTY LTD are performing in the Valley's post-band weekend. Our sister publication, *WAVE*, interviewed the band about their sound, doing live dance music and how Kathmandu made it onto their world tour.

How would you define your music?

PTY LTD: Our music is deep—sophisticated, smooth, sexy, dance music. Our sound is very well known in America and Australia so there it's quite easy to define our genre which is called West Coast House.

How different is that from seeing a DJ spin?

It is improvised but structured. A DJ can't extend a killer track for another two minutes but we can! We always have a great time when we play and love to get the audience involved as much as we can.

How did you decide to 'do' Kathmandu?

We always wanted to take our music overseas. When we got the opportunity to travel to Kathmandu, we jumped—we were totally excited. Plus we heard the people in Kathmandu are all good looking! It's easy to organise to play in major cities around the world, like London and New York, but Kathmandu is something very different.

We hear that 'Who's been watching you', a single from your album that American DJ Derrick Carter remixed, is burning up the dance charts. Is that why PTY LTD are headed there?

After Kathmandu we are heading to Europe for a showcase event and then onto America, where we have had recent #1's on the American dance charts. We went to New York last year and did some quick promo shows to support our vinyl releases.

Is there any eastern instrument in your repertoire?

No, but we will taking a serious mobile recording system with us to collaborate with musicians over here. We hope to meet some local musicians at the *WAVE* event. We will be recording in the studio in Kathmandu with some local musicians if they are up for it.

Wow! Recording as you go...that sounds awesome.

It's something that we always wanted to do—capture sounds of different cultures and people and record them. We will be travelling with a documentary maker and will be releasing a DVD when we return from America.

Catch PTY LTD at:

- Club Platinum from 8PM on 21 September. Yak & Yeti Hotel
- Wavevent at Yala Maya Kendra 4 PM on 21 September
- Jatra 6-10 PM 24 September
- Enticer Lounge-A-Rama 4PM onwards 26 September at Hotel de'l Annapurna

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“We have lost all hope”

RAMESWAR BOHRA
 in NEPALGANJ

Dasai is a time for homecoming when there are long lines at the border crossing of Rupedia. This year, the Nepalis are going in the other direction: fleeing to India to escape fighting after the ceasefire broke down three weeks ago.

Many of them had returned from India after the ceasefire went into effect, only to be displaced again. Most of them are men, and they say farewell to family members and friends who have come down from the hills to see them off at the border. The good byes are brief and perfunctory. There are tears, and faces are downcast. Most don't look back at Nepal after they cross the border with all their belongings in white fertiliser sacks.

“After all these years, I had hoped to celebrate Dasai in peace with all my family but I have to run away to save myself,” says Dalbir Giri from Kalaguan in Salyan, a Maoist stronghold. Giri had come back from India after five years and was looking forward to getting to know his family again. But the end of the ceasefire meant he couldn't stay on. “I'm lucky to be alive, some of my friends were not so fortunate,” he adds. We don't ask him in whose hands his friends had died. Somehow, it doesn't seem to matter.

After January, many Nepalis came back from India to their home districts of Salyan, Dang, Pyuthan and Jajarkot. They had left their wives, parents and children to get along the best they could amidst the insurgency. The little money they sent home took care of their loved ones. But just before this season of celebrations, as the conflict flared up again, they had to leave again. “If I stay here, I'll get killed,” says Shiba Acharya from Jajarkot matter of factly. “What other choice do I have besides running away from home?”

Harka Bahadur BK got a month-long leave from his job in India, but had to leave his family

There will be no Dasai for Nepalis once more forced to flee the fighting in the midwestern hills.

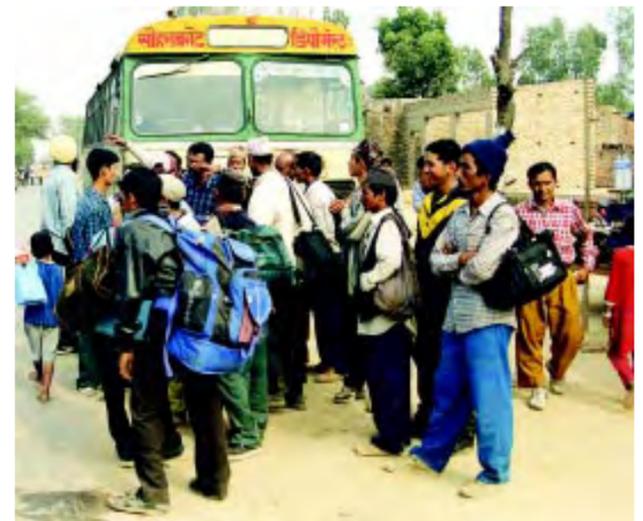


after a few days when the ceasefire broke down and he felt it would be safer to cut his vacation short and leave. “It's not safe at home anymore, that's why I'm leaving,” he told us just before crossing over to catch a bus in India. Six other fellow-villagers are with Harka Bahadur. They murmur that it is better to leave than to face the wrath of the Maoists and the harassment of the army.

After the ceasefire, many young men from the Maoist heartland in western Nepal were keen to join the army and police force. Many fled the Maoists' forced recruitment drives and preferred to join the army. But the military is suspicious of young men from the mid-western hills, and very few got through the screening process. Now, those who didn't get enlisted are in much greater danger from the Maoists as word spreads that they had tried to join the army.

“I left home to join the army, but they didn't take me in. If I return, I'm sure the Maoists will kill me,” says Raju Singh Sejuwal from Hatsinja in Jumla. Raju is among another small group with rucksacks crossing the border at Nepalganj last week.

While most are single men or



groups of men from the same village, increasingly there are entire families leaving. Pari Adhikari has left Jagatipur at Jajarkot with his wife and two children. “We have lost all hope, that's why I'm taking my whole family,” he told us.

Many families leave home out of fear, others are relatives of kidnapped villagers who have been ordered out. Public notices are posted in the villages threatening death to families that don't leave.

Basanta Shrestha's family in Pipara VDC in Banke was preparing for Dasain when Maoists asked him for Rs 150,000. He failed to produced

the amount, and was kidnapped by Maoists. The next morning, a public notice at the local market ordered his family to leave the village or face death.

Last year, when the war was raging, the number of migrants to India was estimated to be around 1,500 every day according to records at Jamunaha police check post here. After the ceasefire, the outflow stopped and the traffic was in the opposite direction with many Nepalis returning home. Now it has reversed once more. “We see many families leaving these days,” says Ram Bahadur Thapa, police-in-charge. The estimate is that at least 2,000 leave very day. ♦

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War spending threatens to squeeze US foreign aid

EMAD MEKAY in WASHINGTON

The Bush administration's most recent request to Congress to fund operations in Iraq and pressure from tax cuts, economic recession and previous spending on the "war on terror", has made economists doubt if the government can fulfil its commitments to foreign aid and overseas development.

Last week the administration said it would request \$87 billion more to fund military operations and the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan for 2004. This request comes on top of some \$79 billion approved by Congress earlier this year and would bring spending for the two years to \$166 billion out of US taxpayers' pockets, further compounding the current budget deficit.

That deficit has been fed mostly by the administration's tax cuts and the large increase in defence spending associated with the self-styled war on terror since 11 September 2001. Economists here are further alarmed by looming demands on the US budget. They say that the ageing of the baby-boom generation is going to put still greater pressure on the social security system and government-financed health care expenditures.

All that would inflate the deficit, estimated at \$540 billion for 2004, the largest budget deficit this rich country has ever known.

Under the best-case scenario predicted by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) two weeks ago, the cumulative deficit would reach \$2.3 trillion over the 10 years ending in 2011. The office said earlier this month that this year's deficit would be \$401 billion, an increase of \$155 billion over what was predicted in March 2003.

Next year's deficit was projected to be

\$480 billion, but with the Iraq request announced by President George W Bush last week, the deficit will climb to \$540 billion or higher, moving it close to a value equivalent to five percent of gross domestic product, a benchmark that many economists consider a danger zone for the economy. This is not only bad news for the US economy, but for nations expecting assistance from Washington.

"There will be a real squeeze on other expenditure areas," said Lael Brainard, of the Brookings Institute, commenting on whether the United States will be able to fulfil its promises on funding for HIV/AIDS, foreign aid and its new Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) for overseas development. The administration, and some development groups, consider the MCA as a new approach that would grant money to nations that demonstrate a commitment to remaking their justice systems, spending more on health and education, and adopting market-opening measures.

"Certainly on the Millennium Challenge Account—that looks very unlikely," Brainard said at a recent Brookings seminar. "And so what looked like a very strong hand a year ago is now, I think, increasingly going to be coming into question on the part of other countries who are looking to those resources to help them underwrite their development plans."

The cash crunch looks likely to whittle away at other aid promises. In May, Bush signed a bill to give \$15 billion—including \$10 billion in newly pledged money—over five years to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. He called the plan "the largest, single up-front commitment in history for an international

public health initiative involving a specific disease".

The AIDS money comes on top of the president's announcement in March 2002 of the largest increase in development aid since the Kennedy administration (1961-63), through a proposed hike of \$10 billion for the MCA. But now with the \$87 billion request for Iraq, economists say that Congress faces limited options, which include plans to cut back requests for the MCA and other foreign aid projects substantially.

"At the present time, the administration



and the Congress have essentially no forward-looking plans or policies to deal with this set of looming problems," said Ralph C Bryant of the Brookings Institution at the same seminar. The president has requested \$ 18.8 billion for foreign aid in the midst of reports that Congress could drastically cut that to trim the deficit.

Development groups have responded with alarm. On Tuesday, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) issued a statement calling on Bush to ensure full funding for the fights against global poverty, MCA and HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. "People's lives depend on presidential action now," said Bill O'Keefe, senior director of policy and advocacy for CRS. ♦ (IPS)

The hawks fall out

ANALYSIS by JIM LOBE

Faced with the rising costs and complications of occupying Iraq, the hard-line coalition around US President George W Bush that led the drive to war with Iraq appears to be suffering serious internal strains.

On the one hand, neo-conservatives, who were the most optimistic about post-war Iraq before the US-led invasion, are insisting that Washington cannot afford either to pull out or to surrender the slightest control over the occupation to the United Nations or anyone else. To a rising chorus of calls by Democrats for Washington to invite the world body to at least take over political control of the transition to Iraqi rule in exchange for a commitment of money and peacekeepers, the neo-cons are urging the administration to send more US troops instead.

Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, on the other hand, is dead-set against deploying yet more troops to join the 180,000 now in Iraq and Kuwait. While he, like the neo-cons, opposes conceding any substantial political role for the UN or anyone else, his preferred option is to transfer power directly to the Iraqis as quickly as possible, even at the risk that reconstituted security forces would be insufficiently cleansed of elements of the former regime's Baath Party.

"It's clear now that Rumsfeld is not interested in remaking Iraq," said Charles Kupchan, foreign-policy analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations. "He wants to get the hell out of there."

The growing divide between the two groups emerged publicly over the past month, as Secretary of State Colin Powell, backed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appeared to persuade Bush and his national security adviser

Condoleezza Rice that the financial costs of the occupation and the strain it was putting on US military forces were simply too much for Washington to bear on its own or with the support of Britain and the other members of the current "coalition of the willing".

"Rumsfeld is not interested in remaking Iraq. He wants to get the hell out of there."

Key Republican lawmakers brought back much the same message from the August recess. They reported that their constituents were increasingly concerned about how badly things appeared to be going in Iraq. As a result, Bush gave Powell the authority to negotiate a new UN Security Council resolution that would lighten the load on Washington, even if that meant giving up substantial control over the occupation. The only caveat was that the US military retain complete control over security. ♦ (IPS)

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Car toons

Have you noticed lately that cars are starting to resemble humans? Give it another million years of evolution, and automobiles will shed their hatchbacks and start walking around on two hind legs. In the old days, when they designed cars, they got a box and attached four wheels. These days, they take a Miss Universe and add an internal combustion engine with T-bone McPherson struts.

This is why we see cars with grinning radiator grilles, cars with double chins, cars with big bosoms, cars with body-coloured waistline moulding, cars with cute behinds, cars that greet you and obey voice commands, cars that throw tantrums and refuse to start unless you tickle them behind their carburetors.

Today's anthropogenic car designers strive to endow their creations with human attributes. So much so, that some cars even have sex. No, they don't mate in the garage when the lights go out (not that I am aware of, anyway) I mean cars these days are actually gender differentiated. There are cars that are definitely male, there are cars that are definitely female, and there are cars that are definitely both.

Take the new Proton Waja, for instance. With its protuberant Y-front crushable bonnet, this is an unmistakably masculine machine that likes to run around in its undies. Or the Toyota Qualis, which in profile bears striking resemblance to Daler Mehndi, and a car that would actually look good in a turban. But for oozing testosterone from every pore, there is nothing to beat the ultimate he-car: that stud from the Mahindra stable, the Scorpio. The Scorpio is to automobiles what Arnold Schwarzenegger is to the California gubernatorial elections.

On the other hand, the sleek curves, well-proportioned chassis, and ventilated disk brakes of the new Santro Xing make it most assuredly a fraulein on ze autobahn. Then there is the Corolla with its spacious trunk of generous 450l storage

capacity which, in hindsight, has striking parallels to Jennifer Lopez. The Wagon R, with its quiet intelligence and unassuming charm, makes any male car look slightly retarded. After that there is the whole trans-sexual range of cars of which we have problems pinning down the exact gender, if any. The foremost example of this is the swarthily effeminate Italian Palio, now tell me is that a he or a she?

Besides looks, a car's name also contributes to its overall personality. There are some perfectly good cars that will never get over the burden of silly names that end in 'o', like the Terrano, Tuxedo or Tornado. There is also a new trend of naming cars after Hollywood box office hits, like *The Matrix*. What next: Cybermutt or Kangaroojack? Auto makers seem to be running out of ideas, so here are some suggestions for the cars of tomorrow.

Hydra H.0: The first hydrogen fuelled car to be introduced into Nepal which will fail police emission tests because soot content in the exhausts are below permissible limits. Also, the Hydra's fuel cells can't run on the adulterated water in Kathmandu's mains.

Libido SX: Ideal car for lovebirds, seats that recline fully to turn car into a honeymoon suite with Torsion-type roll control device and telescopic shock absorbers. The 16-valve multi-point fuel injection system gives you more power and faster pick-up.

Idiota 1200L: The only car in its class especially built for bandhs, hartals and chukka jams. Comes with brick-proof teflon windscreens, armoured turret with forward-mounted 7.5 mm cannon and side-firing rocket launchers. Wheels optional.



NEPALI SOCIETY

Keshari's children

The 8-year-old-boy was walking home from school when a gang of older children blindfolded him, marched him off and robbed him, before offering him drugs. After the older children left, the terrified boy stumbled back to the one place where he felt safe—his school.

This incident was the last straw for Keshari Ghale, principal of Bal Bikash at Chhetrapati. She set up a ground-breaking after-school program to protect her students from harm even when school is officially over for the day. It was yet another in a long line of challenges that Keshari has risen to in the 12 years since she became principal of the primary school in inner-city Kathmandu. This used to be a

typical government school—under-funded and uncared for—but today Bal Bikash is a beacon to students and staff all over the capital.

Keshari explains her vision with simple logic: "I have spent a lot of years in the school, so it's as if the children are my children. They are the future. If the children are spoiled, how will the country be protected? If I protect the children and give them knowledge, then maybe one day they can become our country's leaders."

When Keshari became school principal, the first challenge were the school buildings themselves: crumbling, dark and dangerous. Now, Bal Bikash is a bright and airy place

with walls covered in murals and children's drawings.

This brightness is reflected in the happy attitude of both the children and the teachers. The teachers were, at Keshari's initiation, the first to receive training from the organisation, Educate the Children. Keshari's efforts have been noted by the Ministry of Education, which has awarded her with a medal.

But Keshari refuses to rest on her laurels. She is obsessed with saving her children from the bad influences in the area. "Their parents are very busy, and it is after school that I want to protect the children from bad company." With her brother, Keshari also runs Education Development for Underprivileged Children of Nepal and raises money for her after-school activities, although funding remains difficult to find.

On a typical afternoon in Bal Bikash you can find grade four and five children working with great dedication on their wood craftwork. Grade two plays board games, and grade three is even learning Japanese. The program doesn't just protect the children but gives them an opportunity to do fun activities for which there is no time during normal school hours.

When we asked Keshari what motivates her, she seemed surprised at the question, her dedication is completely natural. "I still have much to do, the children need a lot of help," she says. ♦ (Natalie Toms)



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- बच्चाहरूमा स्वस्थ शरीर, बौद्धिक विकास, तीव्र बृद्धि साथै शारीरिक बृद्धिका लागि ।
- शिशुहरूमा अकमलाउने तथा अदृष्टपल हुल्काउने बचाउने र पढाई तथा अन्य क्रियाकलापमा सक्रिय बनाउनका लागि ।
- जर्नेवरी अन्न र बच्चाको राम्रो स्वास्थ्यको लागि ।

त्यसैले वैज्ञानिक अनुसन्धानद्वारा प्रमाणित गर्नुको पिठोमा आइरनको आपूर्ति उपयुक्त र सरल हुने हुँदा के. एल. दुग्ड ग्रुपले आशिर्वाद चक्की आटालाई आइरन, मिटानीन ए र फोलिक एसिडसहित सुरु पूर्ण पोषिक स्वादिलो चक्की आटामा प्रस्तुत गरेको छ ।

आशिर्वाद
शुद्ध गर्नुको चक्की आटा

गर्नुको सम्पूर्ण स्वाद चक्की आटामा, सम्पूर्ण पोषिकता नरम रोटीमा